

This article was downloaded by: [Louise Geddes]

On: 23 August 2015, At: 06:20

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



Shakespeare

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rshk20>

"Give me your hands if we be friends": collaborative authority in Shakespeare fan fiction

Valerie Fazel^a & Louise Geddes^b

^a Department of English, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA

^b Department of English, Adelphi University, Garden City, New York, USA

Published online: 14 Aug 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Valerie Fazel & Louise Geddes (2015): "Give me your hands if we be friends": collaborative authority in Shakespeare fan fiction, Shakespeare, DOI:

[10.1080/17450918.2015.1048708](https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2015.1048708)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2015.1048708>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

“Give me your hands if we be friends”: collaborative authority in Shakespeare fan fiction

Valerie Fazel^a and Louise Geddes^{b*}

^a*Department of English, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA;* ^b*Department of English, Adelphi University, Garden City, New York, USA*

Due to the interactive affordances of twenty-first century technologies, the relationship between readers and texts is often repositioned as part of a communal experience of consumption and reproduction. Inclusive in this expanding culture are user-generated adaptations of Shakespeare, most saliently fanfic. The fanfic universe prolifically crosses genres, putting the Shakespearean *urtext* in conversation with any other object of cultural interest, and occasionally subjugates the Shakespearean text to the dominant popular icon of the moment. Fanfic manifests textual enjoyment as a creative act; the genre is both recreational and *re-creational*, resulting in new adaptive works that expand the dramas to include sequels, prequels, and off-stage explorations of character and plot. Because Shakespeare is experienced variously through printed text, television, film, theatrical, or digitized performance – all of which underline the instability of an authoritative Shakespeare text – Shakespeare studies is uniquely positioned to expand critical understanding of adaptation and appropriation *vis-à-vis* the fanfiction universe. Fanfic’s online modality, existing on websites that facilitate dialogic interaction between author and audience, offers scholars an ongoing chronicle of reception. Uniquely, online interactions allow Shakespeare cultural critics to analyze the ways user-generated fanfic positions Shakespeare’s work as open to transition, crafting adaptations that illustrate what Shakespeare means to everyday users.

Keywords: fan fiction; appropriation; celebrity; reception; digital media

Fan fiction springs from a what-if moment. It takes something a text has offered to us as inevitable – a plot, a character trait, a setting – and unmakes it, thereby opening up a different set of possibilities [. . .] asking the question [what-if?] both unmakes one story and makes a new one possible. (Parrish 1.1)

In his cultural history of amateur Shakespearean performance, Michael Dobson notes the “mutually recreational” nature of nonprofessional dramatics brings together a potentially homogenized group of participants¹ in a space of play, presumably through a shared passion for the text (203). Distinguishing differences between professional and amateur culture, he observes that in the latter, “the producers and consumers of the theatrical event [meet] as equals under conditions of shared leisure” (203). Dobson’s work calls attention to “how ordinary people read Shakespeare” (Forsythe 130) and importantly recognizes the impact that nonprofessional adaptations have on shaping “the ways in which the Shakespeare canon has been

*Corresponding author. Email: LGeddes@adelphi.edu

not just read but lived out over the last four hundred years” (11). While Dobson only briefly glances towards the enormous corpus of online amateur Shakespeares, his recognition that “in the era of YouTube it may be possible for us to revalue and re-examine the long history of amateur Shakespeare as an important theatrical instance of user-created content” carries within it the significant distinction of the YouTube Shakespearean producer as a “user”, a term that highlights the pragmatic utility of the Shakespearean text in digital and online contexts (17).² Furthermore, by acknowledging online recreational Shakespeares within the historical framework of amateur performance, Dobson’s work draws awareness of the sparsity within Shakespeare scholarship on nonprofessional adaptations shared online.

By moving Shakespeare online, twenty-first century users have not only changed the modes of production and reception of the work,³ but the potential methods scholars may employ as they study emerging genres of adaptation. Margaret Jane Kidnie’s assertion “that adaptation as an evolving category is closely tied to how the work modifies over time and from one reception space to another” is particularly relevant to online Shakespeares, where user-operated digitized platforms engender the sharing of evolving literary work, encouraging new approaches to dramatic adaptation that envision the work as less a product and more a process (5). Additionally, many platforms – blogs, YouTube, Twitter, IMDB web boards, for example – register audience response via reader commentary directly engaging the consumer in the act of textual production. In this climate, Shakespeare becomes not a parent text to be appropriated/adapted,⁴ but a boundless user-driven archive of material to be repurposed and refashioned to suit the tastes of its users in today’s technologically engaged culture.

This article sets out to explore the adaptation practices evinced by online Shakespeare fan fiction (fanfic) groups. We demonstrate that Shakespeare fanfic narratives are constructed, critiqued, and disseminated communally, albeit unequally, by amateur authors and critics influenced by the enormous, diverse archive of textual and mediated Shakespeare adaptations. Through our study of fanfic we seek to understand how the lengthy history of Shakespeare adaptations influences nonprofessional (re)constructions of the dramatist’s works, and how such revised works manifest user understandings of Shakespeare outside the hegemony of dominant institutional structures. At the core of Shakespeare fanfic are two intertwined components – the unstable Shakespearean *urtext* and the ubiquitous presence of the fan author – that seem to exist in a state of perpetual negotiation over the authorized and *author-ized* text. What results is fanfic, an ongoing reimagining of Shakespeare as a cohesive new work of its own. While we make no predictions on how fanfic may impact future adaptations or may add to the historical record of amateur productions, we contend that fanfic, as a niche practice and product of Shakespeare adaptation, has so far attracted too little critical attention within the academic study of popular culture Shakespeares.⁵ That Shakespeare fanfic most saliently reveals user-generated ingenuity is in itself a reason for analytical study, but fanfic also offers Shakespeare cultural critics a microcosm of amateur works that simultaneously showcases various manifestations of Shakespeare as a cultural product, revealing not only the ways in which the texts are shaped according to a group’s interests, but also what occurs when they exist as part of a greater creative dialogue within a community of user-readers. In short, fanfic creates a detailed portrait of how Shakespeare might be diversely adapted, used by interested communities and individuals, and how their adaptations make use of Shakespeare.

The loose explanation that Shakespeare fanfic is a form of literary appropriation that is created by fans of a given Shakespearean text, character, or setting is almost as far as any unmitigated description can run. Fanfic posits alternative endings, improvised “off-stage” lives, sequels, and prequels, to name but a few examples. Fanfic can be presented in Shakespearean-styled verse, or modern prose, and can fuse together, or crossover, characters, texts, and genres, both within and beyond the Shakespearean corpus. The online fanfic archive is staggering in its breadth of material, and Shakespeare is no more sacrosanct than any other cultural phenomena. For example, fanfic might intersect elements of popular movies with storylines or characters drawn from sources as diverse as professional wrestling or Estonian mythology. The subcategories of Shakespeare fanfic cross genre, including self-defining “cartoons”, “games”, and “musicals”, and the more opaque categories of “lemon and lime”, and “slash and het”.⁶ Within the universe of Shakespearean fanfic, favoured characters like Hamlet, Richard II,⁷ and Romeo and Juliet are redeveloped, given a new backstory, inserted into an alternative ending, scripted into an entirely new narrative, or re-envisioned in whatever manner fits the writer’s interest. Lorata’s story, “‘Tis Strange”, for example, retells the narrative of *King Lear* in accordance with Shakespeare’s play, but crossing genre through the production of chapters that see characters move through a corporate boardroom, a post-apocalyptic universe, a high school, and a zombie drama, reflecting one-by-one popular culture icons of recent years. Although fanfic has generated scant critical interest from the Shakespeare scholarly community, perhaps because such amateur renderings “may not be academically respectable” (Teague 82), fanfic study is generating a growing body of scholarship within a variety of academic fields, including literary and narrative theory, ethnography, feminism and queer theory, and cultural studies (Thomas 2).

Because the dramatist’s works are objects of continual remediation, the core combination of Shakespearean text and generative fan/consumer engage in a form of cultural and creative theatrics, creating and replaying idealized manifestations of the text that incessantly absorb and reproduce popular aspects of other aesthetic forms. Fanfic enacts, in its textual form and own unique genre, the performance practice that Marvin Carlson identifies as “ghosting”,⁸ in which a performance is experienced through the inescapable ghosts of prior experience – whether the “ghost” is the performed text, actor, or space, for example – creating performance as a multi-layered text through which prior associations jostle for dominant meaning. Bearing the weight of four centuries of adaptation, Shakespeare’s body of work exists at multiple levels beyond the theatrical, including editorial and pop cultural, resulting in a refracted *urtext* at the core of the fan’s creation, in which the idea of an “original” exists with the same autonomy as its adaptive counterparts. For fans, these concomitant texts inform their creations with equally as much authority as the written words sourced from the First Folio.

Fanfic trades on this multiplicity, reshuffling where the point of origin lies, foregrounding in equal measure text, performance, and other cultural appropriations as the source of fanfic adaptation. Cornel Sandvoss’ definition of the circulation of fan energy as a “field of gravity that may or may not have an *urtext* at its epicentre, but which in any case corresponds with the fundamental meaning structure through which all these texts are read” is further unsettled by the diversity of texts that constitute the Shakespearean archive (kl 508).⁹ Moreover, the breadth of material available to the at-home user of Shakespeare, whether it be via facsimiles of folios, SparkNotes,

Folger Luminarium apps, live streaming, amateur or pirated YouTube presentations, engenders an entire collapse of temporal hegemony, creating an infinitely palimpsested, archontic archive for fan artists to mine.¹⁰ In such an environment, fanfic becomes a free-roaming, self-reflexive examination of its source material, its culture, and anything else that captures the popular imagination at large. Formatted as text and therefore lacking the visual sensation of images found on sites like tumblr or the actions of video/film like those uploaded onto YouTube, fanfic is, nevertheless, digital Shakespeare for immediate, often exuberant consumption in an era when amateur authors earn respect as auteurs within the fanfic community. Very often fanfic playfully interrogates the genres that it exploits, and in doing so, exists as a type of screenshot of Shakespeare's place in the popular imagination, fetishizing its own status as amateur art, and engaging in Dobson's mutual recreation, and *re-creation* of the Shakespearean *urtext*.

Equally important is the role of the fanfic author as curator of the "dynamic process that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users" (Kidnie 2). Fanfic authors are producers for a niche audience that form a subculture group of Shakespeare fans that fall under Richard Burt's non-derogatory label, "melancholy loser[s]".¹¹ And not unlike the writers of pulp novels that feature Shakespeare characters or the iconic figure himself, fanfic authors create works that eschew "'high art' aspirations and often celebrate their own specialized, even topical appeal to small transitory audiences" (Osborne 2002, 128). Other than their own imaginations, fanfic authors face very few limitations; they approach the body of Shakespeare's work as an unconstrained archive of material that can be drawn from in contemporary instances. Furthermore, unlike almost all other representative Shakespearean media, online technology enables both unlimited dissemination of fan work *and* author connectivity with readers to better cater to their tastes, wants, and desires. Authors of fanfic operate as critical connoisseurs of a given *urtext* (regardless of its form), understanding issues of genre, characterization, performance, and language at a sophisticated level, and yet as fans, they also want in on the work they admire, believing they have "something potentially interesting to contribute" to their community of online readers (Jenkins *Textual Poachers*, 154).

For the fanfic author, the communal aspect of the creative process is crucial. As Henry Jenkins notes, "For most fans, meaning-production is not a solitary and private process but rather a social and public one" (*Textual Poachers*, 75). Online culture has seen the blossoming of fandoms, social communities that self-identify as unified groups of aficionados. Once confined to niche groups of followers, such as *Star Trek*'s long-time fan base, "Trekkies", fan communities no longer merely "follow" the output of an admired actor, musician, filmmaker, television show, fictive material, or character, but they actively generate new work for consumption and dissemination online within their particular Discourse community.¹² These self-selecting groups often overlap, with a clear sense of identity that transcends favoured moments of a given culture and preferred characters. For example, groups often develop their own vernacular and identifying nickname.¹³ In spite of the conflation of various fandoms, these strategies attempt to homogenize an otherwise diverse group of users, creating an idealized and meta-critical audience for the works. As a generic entity, fandom is becoming increasingly self-aware, producing not only well-organized archives for disseminating the work, replete with its own rating processes, but also its own self-study. The *Organization for Transformative Works*, a peer-

reviewed, academic journal and advocacy group dedicated to archiving fan cultural output, defines fanfic in a similar vocabulary to that of the adaptive experience: transformative. “Transformative works” is a process that articulates “non-mainstream expressions of cultural identity” through fan-generated interpretations of a cultural touchstone, recognizing the output of its users as a living, breathing chronicle of reception (transformativeworks.org). Moreover, the fans are acutely self-aware of the uses they make of their text. Larinenoire’s *Richard II* fanfic, “The Readiness is All,” in which Richard meets Sherlock Holmes in a Victorian opium den, is met with gleeful replies such as, “ZOMG HOLMES AND META”. The very nature of fanfic actively encourages its users to view themselves as participants in an interactive game of textual hide-and-seek, in which fanfic authors playfully integrate unexpected cross-cultural references for their readers to discover and enjoy.

Like many online platforms, most fanfic websites invite interaction between audience members via a comment feature. These actions manifest Jenkins’ assertions that “fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead they become reactive participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings” (*Textual Poachers*, 24). Through the shared experience of responding, liking, reblogging, and writing, commentators (and lurkers) form a heterogeneous, ephemeral community whose social relationship is exercised through dialogue, information exchange, and common interest. In fanfic, the “traditional roles of producer/audience are no longer clear [making fans] central actors in the production” of new texts, imprinting both their critical ideas and creative vision on Shakespeare’s body of work (Potts). It is these cultural practices that provide scholars a window of opportunity to better understand Shakespeare in the amateur hands of pop culture fans. Fanfic signals the ways that Shakespeare adaptation evolves and is shaped by communities of users who accept, reject, or otherwise debate a particular textual or “theatrical enactment,” either original or as extension to Shakespeare’s play (Kidnie 7). Moreover, as fanfic manifests the question of what or who constitutes the Shakespearean audience, it also carries with it potential answers to such an inquiry through the work itself, with fanfic authors frequently inserting themselves into the content of the piece, whether it be through the redirection of the narrative according to their interest, the vicarious participation through newly created characters or scenario, or the shaping of its reception through response.

In spite of its more ostensibly static format, presenting text in blog form or thread format, fanfic is responsive yet ephemeral, but most of all formatted to emphasize the communal aspect of the experience of reading and writing – an experience unique to digital literature – replacing the traditional image of the solitary book reader with a community of reader-artists who respond to a work with new acts of creation. Most fanfic sites enable readers to respond as reviewers, to follow a particular story as it evolves, or to contact the author via public comment or private message. Once published, a fanfic story can be edited, revised, or expanded at will. In Neothan the Wise’s fanfic, “A Midsummer Night’s Nightmare”, for instance, the author echoes Puck’s epilogue, “give me your hands”, directly appealing to his audience to respond in his summary message: “My biggest request is that you write a review, good or bad, and be patient with my absurdly slow rate of updating”. Fanfic can alter and morph in response to its audience, often highlighting “the motivations and desires of readers” (Thomas 6). Often more popular authors serialize or extend their “works in progress”, a common tag of the fanfic universe, by reader request.

Comments on fanfic sites can quickly spiral into dialogue in which the author responds to compliments, questions, or critiques, creating a fundamentally collaborative genre that literally frames the text with interpretation through an author's introductory notes and a post-reading discussion.

"No more than reason", a fan adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*, is both a salient example of textual expansion and a demonstration of fanfic's interactive nature. Focused on Benedick and Beatrice's post-marriage and pregnancy, "No more" represents a common fanfic subgenre – the sequel – whereby the fanfic author places familiar characters in imagined scenes that extend beyond the scope of Shakespeare's dramatic text. Like most fanfic, it explores the narrative's "what if" potential, yet as sequel, it provides audiences with "what else" possibilities for fans' favourite characters (Pugh 47). Authored by jamjar and published on the fanfic website *archiveofourown.org* (AOO), the summary to "No more" reads "Newly-wedded bliss, Beatrice and Benedick style". Published in December 2013, the five scene, one act, 7420-word "No more" has, to date, generated 2185 hits, 62 comments, and 178 "kudos," AOO's equivalent to Facebook's "likes", that is mimetic of audience applause.¹⁴ This third-person narrated extension and follow-up to Shakespeare's play is told from Benedick's perspective, and evinces jamjar's familiarity with an archive of *Much Ado About Nothing* performances and Shakespeare's text.¹⁵ Through her critical interrogation of Shakespeare's play and extended ending, jamjar calls attention to Benedick's dependence on Beatrice's wealth, scrutinizes Claudio's constancy, fleshes out Hero's character, and comments on the play's homosocial bonding.

"No more" manifests the source play's coded signifiers, creating an adaptation that self-identifies as Shakespearean even as it expands beyond the boundaries of its parent text. The play opens with Benedick musing, in prose, over the pleasure of sharing a bed with Beatrice: "Marriage, Benedick thought, was an eminently practical solution to many of life's problems" (jamjar). While Benedick's thought sounds more like Jane Austen than Shakespeare, jamjar soon follows this line with banter not unlike the self-referential language that appears in some of Shakespeare's works. Discussing fears over Beatrice's safety in the forthcoming birth of their child, Beatrice and Benedick's dialogue evinces metadramatic characteristics not incompatible with Shakespeare works:¹⁶

Benedick: A normal woman might die, but not a harpy like thee. Echida bore for the Cerberus, Scylla her gorgon daughters and more. Thinkst thou thou wilt do anything less? [. . .] As if death would risk your companionship, Lady Disdain. Cruel Mistress. Vicious virago.

Beatrice: Vicious virago? Really, you talk like a tuppenny playwright.

Benedick: A tuppenny playwright? [. . .] What, like the ones that ply their trade by the docks, selling cheap sonnets to sailors?

Beatrice: Mmm, or in back alleys, giving soldiers epic poetry, two at a time.

The lines do the work of illustrating jamjar's familiarity with Shakespeare's characterization of Beatrice and Benedick, even so much as including Benedick's well-known nickname for Beatrice, "Lady Disdain" (1.1.112). The playful engagement of cheap poetry is both a nod to the celebrated wordplay of *Much Ado's* lovers, and jamjar's professed self-consciousness at tackling the linguistic dexterity of Shakespearean verse.

As this narrative dialogue attests, jamjar's story-world interchange consciously attempts to imitate the linguistic nuances of early modern dramatic language, albeit tempered by twenty-first century syntax. Popular with her fanfic audience is Benedick's line earlier on in the same scene: "Tis a shame neither of us can be widowed while the other lives . . . we could have such entertainment in it, and then at the end of each day, we could make our way back to each other and report our adventures". In her response, fan Beatrice_Otter writes, "What a wonderful story! You really captured Beatrice and Benedick, and *just* enough Shakespearean language to make it sound right without enough to make it hard to understand". Jamjar responds, "Yeah, the language thing is a beast. Writing archaically, for modern ears . . . it's all compromises between what sounds correct, but awkward and what's easy to read, but feels wrong". This modified Shakespeare-like language operates in a similar manner to the oral, or gestural, emphasis that is common in twenty-first century performances or readings for the sake of auditory clarity. Jamjar's emphasis on "what sounds correct" accentuates how such effects importantly recognize linguistic markers that make Shakespeare sound like Shakespeare. Like an actor who offers extra-textual physical annotations to convey his point, jamjar sees the fanfic author's task as one that must build a language that is at once accessible and readily identifiable as "Shakespearean", yet casting aside iambic verse in favour of language and syntax that reads/sounds more recognizably as speech understandable for her readers. Her audience affirms her efforts, responding with compliments or kudos.

On fanfic websites like *AOO*, viewers encounter two distinct dialogical modes: the dialogue within the story-world and the comment section responses between author and audience. These two layers of communication – diegetic dialogue followed by post-performance talkback by means of the fanfic's webpage's comments section – individually, as well as concomitantly, create a textual exchange that, due to the nature of online fora, remains ongoing, adding to readers' understanding of jamjar's (Shakespeare's) narrative. "No more's" comment section illustrates the genre's receptiveness to critical engagement, illustrating the fluctuations of media that fanfic centralizes within its field of gravity. Jamjar and her followers' understanding of *Much Ado About Nothing* draws together perceptions of the text pieced together from reading, cinema adaptations, and contemporary theatre culture, explicitly recognizing the role that each interpretation plays in their collective understanding of the text. Their conversation employs the very visible act of message exchange, which in turn becomes part of performance experience for sequential viewers of the fanfic. Such rich conversations may develop into practical discussions about Shakespeare, his characters, the complexity of recreating the language, and the act of creating additional scenes for other fans of *Much Ado About Nothing*. For example, millernumber1's commendation that Hero is written "just as kind and loyal as she is in the play, but without any sense that she's weak or unintelligent" is a note on interpretation that suggests the viewer's knowledge of the literary *urtext*, and seeks some kind of performative redress in fanfic that challenges millernumber1's experience of the character up to this point. On more than one occasion, the comments allude to the 2011 London stage production that starred Catherine Tate and David Tennant, who were also the stars of the massively popular BBC television series, *Doctor Who*. The evocations of this fan favourite TV show further homogenizes this particular audience by the assumption of a familiarity with the "Doctor Who" production.

Jamjar's offering ties itself explicitly to a literary *urtext*, albeit with a degree of ambivalence. It tags itself with the phrase, "wordplay is foreplay", attempting to consciously affiliate itself with a literary conception of Shakespeare, which is complicated throughout the subsequent dialogue. Jamjar repeatedly refers to performative and textual choices, the imaginings of which shaped the nature of "No more", offering a potent justification for her decisions that traverses both the literary and theatrical, even as she foregrounds the value she places on the literary quality of the text. Other fanfic works foreground the contemporary context of Shakespearean culture, engaging primarily with eminent productions of the text, as opposed to the plays themselves. Such a response is a complex engagement with celebrity and a new form of theatrical culture that allows the casual consumer unregulated access to performance, as a result of "live" theatre being brought online. The cultural crossover that sets a cult celebrity (such as Tennant or Tate) into a Shakespearean context that "No more" hints at in its comments section maintains a strong presence in fanfic, reshuffling the *urtext* that underpins fanfic to accommodate an ongoing creative dialogue around other objects of fan interest that circulate around Shakespeare.

A sense of the multiplicity of Shakespeares that inspire fan-created narratives can be found in the sheer volume of fanfic featuring the Shakespearean actor, Tom Hiddleston, who starred in the BBC's 2012 *Hollow Crown* series. Hiddleston, whose role as the villain in *The Avengers* blockbuster has spurred him to achieve the curious status of cult celebrity on the Internet (particularly among young female users of social media sites such as tumblr), has generated notable interest in the history plays across the more prolific archives.¹⁷ "Pride" by Persephone622 is the fourth contribution to a series inspired by the BBC "Hollow Crown," entitled *Healer*, which centres on the sexual relationship between Hal and a young female physician, Lizzie, an original character (or OC), created by Persephone622. "Pride" represents a popular strain of fanfic, casually referred to as "slash", which denotes the textual backslash that attaches two characters to one another, almost always sexually. In spite of the vast potential for Shakespearean intertextual crossover that a young female physician attending a dying king might engender, Persephone622 acknowledges, in her own words, that the fanfic is structured around the *Hollow Crown* series "mainly because that version is my chief inspiration", reading the television adaptation as a Shakespearean text in its own right. Unlike Jamjar, Persephone622's interest in Shakespeare is secondary to her interest in the actor playing Henry V, making the celebrity of the Shakespearean actor the locus of the fanfic. Persephone622 writes her fanfic entirely in prose, making an effort to approximate a sense of early modern language, and incorporate historical detail in the "extreme medieval medical practices" she describes.

Persephone622 continually jokes about her interest in appropriating the text in her tags that promise "mostly porn . . . but the plot is there, I swear". Structured around the erotic passages is a loose narrative that sees Hal through Shrewsbury and, at the time of writing this essay, ends on a field in Agincourt with the promise of more to come. In a fascinating twist on the narrative of the second tetralogy, the character of Lizzie appears to echo Falstaff's loss of Hal as she watches him evolve into Henry V, which necessitates a shift towards an official identity that threatens to consume the young man she has previously known. Following the siege at Harfleur (an addition typical of Persephone622's elaboration on the Shakespearean narrative), Lizzie watches her imperious lover take command of the conquered city, telling the reader

that “I could only stare, open-mouthed, as he continued, my Hal lost behind the façade of soldier and warrior king.” In spite of *Healer*’s ostensible dependence on the two parts of *Henry IV*, Falstaff is entirely omitted from the fanfic (as are almost all of the other characters from the plays), which enables Lizzie to both represent and transcend her place as his connection to the lower classes of English society because she holds Hal in sexual thrall. Although Henry ignores her in public (even though she chooses to stand “directly in his line of sight” as he demands compliance from the town), when Lizzie later confronts him privately, challenging him not for his latent cruelty towards the citizens of Harfleur, but because of his capacity to control his affection for her in public, he illustrates his devotion. She reprimands him in private, asking him, “you dismiss me with as little affection as you give the creatures beneath your feet and you deign to call me Lizzie?” Henry’s capitulation to her defiance is cemented with more sex, and her recognition that he is “my Hal”.

The precarious balance of a sexual relationship between a powerful, extraordinary man, and the “ordinary” girl is a not uncommon in erotic fanfic (the cultural phenomenon *Fifty Shades of Gray* originated as *Twilight* fanfic, for example), and manifests itself more as a Shakespeare-themed fantasy fuelled by a beloved performance, rather than a meditation on the text itself. The fanfic is written from the first-person perspective of a young female doctor, which allows for the easy excision of scenes such as the introduction of Catherine of Valois, who would complicate the immediacy of the fantasy. The physical portrayal of Hal is clearly intended to invoke Hiddleston, an assumption based on the foregrounding of physical likeness, and easily reinforced by tracing the online networks of Persephone622 and her followers. What *Healer* and other similar fanfics enact is the act of willful submission to an illusion that foregrounds embodied representation as the primary source text for the fiction. That is to say, it recognizes both Hal and Hiddleston as central to the characterization of the male lead, fusing them together in a world very vividly created by the fanfic creator, while acknowledging the author’s role as spectator to another Shakespearean appropriation. The emphatic sexualization of traditionally unerotic characters speaks to a culture of celebrity that continues to fuel mainstream theatrical representation, and affords scholars a lucid (and occasionally lurid) understanding of how popular Shakespeare is received in the twenty-first century.

Such conflation of a fictional world (recognizing that celebrity is indeed, a fiction) is known as “crossover”, and is common practice amid fan culture at large. Hiddleston, in particular, is known for his portrayal of the villain Loki in the vastly popular Marvel superhero movie franchises, *Thor* and *The Avengers*.¹⁸ Consequently, many fanfics that feature Hiddleston-influenced representations of the history plays crossover to include references to these other roles. For instance, Captain Mercurian’s fanfic, “No Light,” imagines Iron Man (as depicted in the Marvel movie by the Hollywood actor Robert Downey, Jr.) as an English Lord, embroiled in a homoerotic relationship with Prince Hal. Such meta-textuality is no less self-referential than Kenneth Branagh’s blonde-haired nod to Olivier in his 1995 film *Hamlet*, and speaks to the interplay of contemporary contextuality that continuously surrounds Shakespeare’s text in performance. Shakespeare, in a fanfic author’s hands, becomes Marvin Carlson’s “tissue of quotations” which performs to the infinite desires of its audience (78).

Adulterated, sometimes with reckless, far-fetched inclusions from a seemingly boundless archive of source material, fanfic is then a unique genre that folds in the

dynamics of interplay between text and performance as users interpret and reinterpret resource materials – film, text, television, stage, actors, and characters – from prior generations and iterations of the works. The archive of Shakespeare fanfic is immeasurable, and continually expanding in response to the needs of particular niche communities. Meltha's slash fiction, "Good Night Sweet Prince", for example, housed on the popular multimedia site tumblr, is part of a larger critical blog entitled *Fuck Yeah Queer Shakespeare* that posts fan art, personal meditations, and mostly answers fan questions about the homoerotics of Shakespeare's works. The blog, which continuously fields questions about homoerotic interpretations of texts and representations in plays, is a space of discovery for queer Shakespeare as an act of communal social affirmation for what appears to be an emergent group of LGBTQIA high schoolers and college students. In another forum, Ellen_fremedon's fanfic on the now defunct site Yuletidetreasure.org, entitled "Yule Morning, or Malvolio's Revenge", is an extraordinarily detailed sequel to *Twelfth Night*, written in iambic pentameter across five acts celebrating the adherence to the poetic form that leaves delighted readers to speculate on the professional or academic identity of the author. What these and other examples suggest is that Shakespearean fanfic is continuously morphing to reflect needs of its user communities in ways that foster exploration and experimentation, creating a document of reception that uses and recognizes Shakespeare's place in an ever-changing world where and when cultural mores shift to accommodate human needs and desires.

As Teague makes clear, fanfic articulates the pleasure of Shakespearean discovery (Teague 82), and manifest in that pleasure are the processes of reception that encourage each generation to participate in Shakespeare's works, illustrating what Shakespeare means to them. In this, fanfic has the potential to reveal why "certain kinds of readers" and writers are drawn to Shakespeare (Thomas 7). Shakespearean fanfic largely elides the obsolescence inherent in print manifestations of the work by its continual evolution within its archive. Whether it is the expansion of extant characters, or the blending of a character and its celebrity performer, or a crossover that incorporates a variety of contexts, fanfic's temporality foregrounds the malleability of the Shakespearean text, and is an efficient reminder of why, 400 years later, we are all still here. Fanfic also serves as a reminder that "we can only know the work by reinventing it" (Holderness).¹⁹ So, too, can we only know the defining limits of Shakespeare adaptation by placing pressure on preconceived margins of what counts as (revisions of) the dramatic texts. Fanfic matters as a vibrant, bawdy, robust opportunity to see inside the head of a contemporary popular Shakespeare audience, and experience the adaptive transition that occurs when active participants in digital communities claim Shakespeare for themselves.

Notes

1. Dobson notes that the performers and audience of amateur dramatics are more likely to share a social class (203).
2. In *Passing Strange*, Ayanna Thompson assesses performance-based pedagogy that is based on the creation of YouTube videos, noting the extent to which the abridged format of YouTube "unmoored historically, linguistically, and narratively" (146) the chosen text, creating a neutral space through which cultural identity was explored. Stephen O'Neill argues that "YouTube Shakespeare videos are cultural texts in themselves . . . forms of creativity and as Shakespeare interpretation, even criticism" (15).

3. We use Margaret Jane Kidnie's term the "work" in agreement with her assessment that "work" effectively underlines the Shakespeare play "as process" rather than a fixed text or performance (5).
4. The terms use, adapt, appropriate, revise, etc., and their conjugations are provisional terms used interchangeably in this article. In this given moment of rapid cultural change in the production and reproduction of re-newed material, we follow Teague's recommendation to "surrender to the messiness" (76) that the provisional use of these terms suggests. For a more extensive discussion on the adaptation and appropriation as metaphoric terminology and taxonomy, see Fran Teague's informative "Using Shakespeare with Memes, Remixes and Fanfic."
5. Gray *et al.* assert, "It is precisely *because* fan consumption has grown into a taken-for-granted aspect of modern communication and consumption that it warrants critical analysis and investigation more than ever" (kl 285). See Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington for a comprehensive overview of fan studies scholarship.
6. Fan and fanfic lexicon and terminology often signals to community members tropes and genres. For instance, "Lemon and Lime" fanfic includes both explicit and non-explicit eroticism; "het" fiction revolves around heterosexual relationships either created by the fan or based on the characters' relationship within the source text. Other common generic designations include "gen" for narratives that have no foisted romantic relationships and "slash", a genre antithetical to het: "Slash stories posit a same-sex relationship, usually one imposed by the author and based on perceived homoerotic subtext" (Busse and Hellekson 10). Fan-generated and -archived terminology glossaries are widespread on the internet. See <http://fanlore.org/wiki/Category:Glossary> or <http://www.angelfire.com/falcon/moonbeam/terms.html#H>; and Busse, Kristina and Karen Hellekson "Introduction: Work in Progress." *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, 5–32.
7. Richard II, perhaps a less likely choice than Richard III, is the preferred monarch, mostly because of the recent celebrity performances by Ben Whishaw and David Tennant. The role that celebrity plays in the shaping of the canon of "popular" Shakespearean fanfic is discussed at length later in the essay.
8. Carlson's argument that all theatre is "a cultural activity deeply involved with memory and haunted by repetition" (11) manifests itself in the intramurality of fan art.
9. kl (Kindle location).
10. Specifically applying Jacques Derrida's 1995 "archontic principle" theory to fan fiction, Abigail Derecho argues that rather than derivative, fanfic is archontic literature. Fanfic, she demonstrates, manifests "the internal drive of an archive to continually expand" (64) while it maintains links "overtly to preexisting texts" (66).
11. The pejorative term "losers" is misleading. Richard Burt defines melancholy losers as individuals who happen "to both be a reader of Shakespeare and a reader/viewer of media and subgenres in which Shakespeare is adapted" (8).
12. The "big-D" designation of Discourse community marks James Paul Gee's concept of (learning and) identity through everyday practices (7). According to Gee's theory, individuals who share the same interests, and often partake in a shared interest in artifacts such as clothing, food, language, and cultural interests make up a Discourse community. They share the same "affinity" spaces and share or make contact with others who interact with the same kinds of materials, texts, etc. Fanfic websites, for instance, are affinity spaces where people negotiate their understandings of Shakespeare and a place where informal learning through experience and shared language takes place. See Gee.
13. For instance, American fans of Sherlock Holmes call themselves "Sherlockians"; fans of Jane Austen are known as "Austenites". Henry Jenkins labels fans of Shakespeare "Bardies", although Roberta Pearson argues that "Shakespeare fans would reject the semi-derisory" nickname.
14. "No more" is gifted to fanfic author bropunzeling, a common practice within the fan community in which writing is created as a "gift" for another fan, once again pointing to the existence of certain homogeneities within what might otherwise seem to be an overwhelmingly diverse body of users. Media fan communities have their own gift economy practices that are designed "to create and cement a social structure" among fans with shared interests

- (Hellekson 115). Such gifts “are incorporated into a multivocal dialogue that creates a meta-text, the continual composition of which creates a community” (115).
15. Jamjar’s identity in real life (rl) is not revealed in her profile. We gendered Jamjar as female based on her other profile name, magpie. We are aware that our gendering of fanfic authors is not without political implication, but do so within this essay to simplify the pronoun usage, and take our lead from the discourse found within Transformative Works’ mission statement, which indicates that fan work is “historically rooted in a primarily female culture.” Information on jamjar’s profile page indicates that (at the time of writing this essay) she has authored 27 total fanfics. To date “No more” is her only Shakespeare appropriation.
 16. We changed the formatting of direct quotations from “No More” to identify Benedick and Beatrice as speakers of particular lines. The original fanfic formatting appears as narrative (prose) lines.
 17. There was also a surge of *Coriolanus*-inspired fanfic, the dates of which roughly correspond to the Josie O’Rourke’s 2013 production at the Donmar Warehouse, which starred Hiddleston and was broadcast internationally via NTLive.
 18. The Marvel movie franchise has its own large fanfic community. Additionally, *The Avengers* (2012) was directed by Joss Whedon, whose body of work, known to fans as Whedonverse, has a large fan following. Whedon recently directed an adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012). Furthermore, Whedon is responsible for the closed canons of *Buffy*, *Firefly*, *Serenity*, and *Dollhouse*, all of which also have tremendous fanfic Discourse communities. Some of Whedon’s well-loved popular television show characters have been crossover scripted into instances of Shakespeare fanfic. For example, “Nothing in the World” summarized by fanfic author illmatchtheminrenown as less a *Buffy* and *Much Ado About Nothing* fanfic crossover and “more of a melding of two Whedon ’verses to find a happy ending”: <http://archiveofourown.org/works/883419/chapters/1701755>
 19. Holderness is representative of the Shakespeare scholar-fan whose critical work manifests itself in traditional scholarship and creative writing, including *The Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (2011) and his forthcoming creative-scholarly-pedagogical project, *Black and Deep Desires: William Shakespeare, Vampire Hunter*.

References

- Burt, Richard. *Shakespeare After Mass Media*. New York, NY: Palgrave. 2002. Print.
- Busse, Kristina, and Karen Hellekson. “Introduction: Work in Progress.” *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2006. 5–32. Print.
- Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003. Print.
- Derecho, Abigail. “Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction.” *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*. Ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006. 61–78. Print.
- Dobson, Michael. *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.
- Ellen_fremedon. “Yule Morning, Or, Malvolio’s Revenge.” *An Archive Of Our Own*. Organization For Transformative Works, 25 Dec. 2007. Web. 25 Apr. 2015. <<http://archiveofourown.org/works/6630>>.
- Forsyth, V.L. “‘Let Reason Serve To Make The Truth Appear’: How The Shakespeare Club Of Mobile Studied Shakespeare From 1897 To 1918.” *Shakespeare* 7.2 (2011): 129–41. Print.
- Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Gray, Jonathan, C. Lee Harrington, and Cornel Sandvoss, eds. *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York, NY: New York UP, 2007. Kindle.
- Hellekson, Karen. “A Fannish Field of Value: Online fan Gift Culture.” *Cinema Journal* 48.4 (2009): 113–18. *Project Muse*. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

- Holderness, Graham. "'Dressing Old Words New': Shakespeare, Science, and Appropriation." *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespearean Appropriation* 1.2 (2005): N.p. Web. 12 Feb. 2015.
- Holderness, Graham. *The Nine Lives of William Shakespeare*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011. Print.
- Holderness, Graham. *Black and Deep Desires: William Shakespeare, Vampire Hunter*. Winchester, UK: Top Hat Books, 2015. Print.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture – Updated Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- Jamjar. "No More than Reason." *An Archive Of Our Own*. N.p., 19 Dec. 2013. Web. 23 Apr. 2015. <<http://archiveofourown.org/works/1090029>>.
- Kidnie, Margaret Jane. *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*. London: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Lareinenoire. "The Readiness Is All." *The Phrensies*. Livejournal.com, 15 Jan. 2010. Web. 25 Apr. 2015. <<http://the-phrensies.livejournal.com/10850.html>>.
- Lorata. "'Tis Strange." *An Archive Of Our Own*. Organization For Transformative Works, 29 June 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2015. <<http://archiveofourown.org/works/1866042>>.
- Meltha. "Good Night, Sweet Prince (A Hamlet/Horatio Fic)." *Fuck Yeah Queer Shakespeare*. Tumblr, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2015. <<http://fuckyeahqueershakespeare.tumblr.com/post/6321961121>>.
- Neothan The Wise. "A Midsummer Night's Nightmare." *Fanfiction.net*, n.d., 11 Sept. 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2015. <<https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9679244/1/A-Midsummer-Night-s-Nightmare>>.
- O'Neill, Stephen. *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. Print.
- Osborne, Laurie. "Harlequin Presents: That 70s Shakespeare and Beyond." *Shakespeare After Mass Media*. Ed. Richard Burt. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 127–149. Print.
- Parrish, Juli J. "Metaphors we read by: People, process and fan fiction." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 14 (2013): 1–16. *transformativeworks.org*. Web. 20 Dec. 2014.
- Pearson, Roberta. "Bachies, Bardies, Trekkies, and Sherlockians." *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York, NY: New York UP, 2007. Kindle.
- Persephone622. "Healer." *An Archive Of Our Own*. Organization For Transformative Works, 20 Jan. 2015. Web. 25 Apr. 2015. <<http://archiveofourown.org/series/68179>>.
- Potts, Liza. "Can't Stop the Fandom: Writing Participation in the Firefly 'Verse." *WIDE Research*. Michigan State U., n.d. Web. 22 Apr. 2015. <projects.lizapotts.org/jaynehat>.
- Pugh, Sheenagh. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*. Glasgow: Seren, 2005. Print.
- Sandvoss, Cornel. "The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture." *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. Eds. Gray, Jonathan, C. Lee Harrington, and Cornel Sandvoss. New York, NY: New York UP, 2007. Kindle.
- Teague, Fran. "Using Shakespeare with Memes, Remixes and Fanfic." *Shakespeare Survey* 64. Ed. Peter Holland. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 74–82. Print.
- The Organization For Transformative Works*. Web. <<http://transformativeworks.org>>.
- Thomas, Bronwen. "What is Fanfiction and Why are People Saying Such Nice Things About It?" *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 3 (2011): 1–24. Print.
- Thompson, Ayanna. *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.